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AUTHOR Thoresen, Jean H.
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ABSTRACT

Many single parents involved in higher education are nontraditional women students returning to school after raising children or recently divorced women who must equip themselves to improve or maintain the economic status of both themselves and their children. These students may need special help in identifying careers that interest them. It is also crucial that they know which people in their lives can provide the most support and those who may, deliberately or inadvertently, sabotage the returning student's educational goals. When an institution does not have a program to help such students, the role of the individual faculty member or advising staff member becomes even more important. Two techniques based on values clarification and values realization research and materials may be especially useful: "Prior Jobs Inventory" and "Relationship Circles." Although advising should not become "unlicensed therapy," values clarification techniques can be easily and properly used by faculty and advisors who become trained in their application. Research suggests that these techniques are effective in helping nontraditional returning women students. Thus, the self-sufficiency of single parents within an educational environment can be enhanced. (Author/CML)

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"Turning Fins Into Feathers, or Helping Students Soar"

Decision Clarification for Non-Traditional Students

Jean H. Thoresen
Sociology & Applied Social Relations
Eastern Connecticut State University

presented at the

Second Annual National Conference on
Education and Training:
Route to Self-Sufficiency for Single Parents

University of Kentucky
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"Turning Fins Into Feathers, or

Helping Students Soar"

Decision Clarification for Non-Traditional Students

ABSTRACT[1]

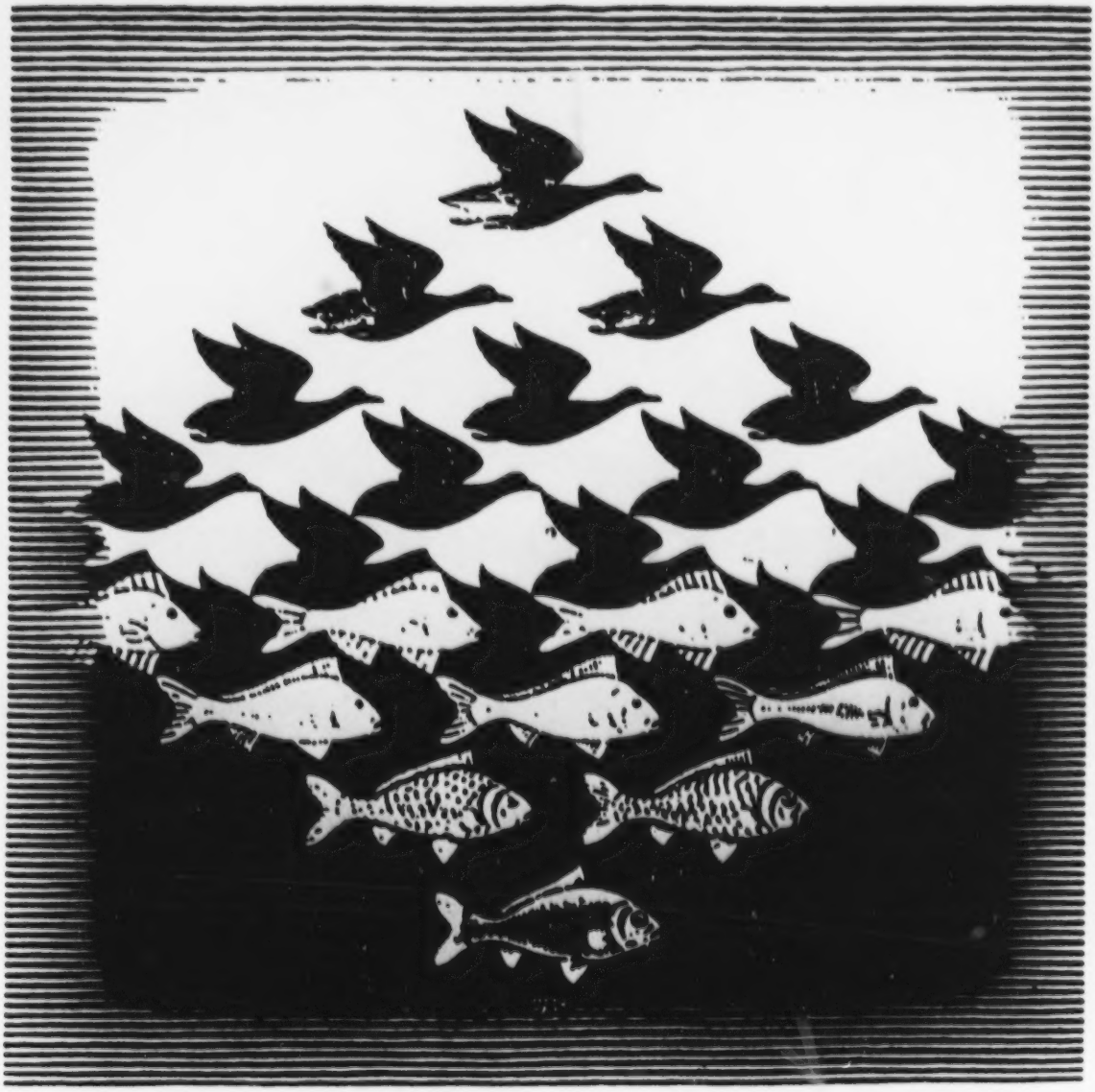
Many single parents involved in pursuing higher education are non-traditional women students returning to school after having taken time off to bear their children, or women whose "singlehood" is a consequence of a recent divorce, and who find that they must equip themselves to improve or maintain the economic status of both themselves and their children. These women often have background skills and experiences which can be useful to them in their academic work. Often, however, they may not realize this, because they see themselves as people who have been out of the educational milieu for a few years, and they are often less than self-confident about their ability to handle academic work.

Part of the goal of any program working with such students would be to help develop their self-esteem and self-confidence by helping them identify the skills they already possess which would be of use to them as they return to school. Additionally, these students may need special help

[1]As published in the set of Abstracts provided for the Second Annual National Conference on Education and Training: The Route to Self-Sufficiency for Single Parents, held at the University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, June 12-14, 1999 (as published, except for typographical error correction).

in identifying careers which interest them. It is also important that returning non-traditional students with other family members in their lives be able to identify sources of emotional and practical support both for their decision to return to school, and the actual work of getting through a degree program. Because these students are often balancing class time, study time, child care or family demands, and somtimes a job to pay for it all, it is crucial that they know which people in their lives can provide the most support and, unfortunately, those who may, deliberately or inadvertently, "sabotage" the returning student's educational goals.

While some institutions provide entire programs to help such students, many do not yet have full-fledged programs in place. In that case, the role of the individual faculty member or advising staff member becomes even more important. Two techniques based on Values Clarification and Values Realization research and materials may be especially useful. A "Prior Jobs Inventory" can help students identify skills and experiences, paid or volunteer, in their background which can strengthen their academic work. "Relationship Circles" can help identify other people in the student's life who may be sources of either emotional support or emotional stress, and whom it may therefore be desirable either to bring closer or to distance in order to help the student accomplish her goals. While advising should not become "unlicensed therapy," values clarification techniques are easily and properly used by faculty and advisors who become trained in their application. The purpose of this presentation is to show how the two techniques mentioned above may be effectively used by faculty advisors. Values clarification research, the work of Sidney Simon and Lee Silverstein, and some of the theoretical bases of Albert Ellis' Rational-Emotive Therapy, as well as anecdotal evidence from my own use of these techniques over several years, suggest that they are effective in helping non-traditional returning women students, and thus can enhance the self-sufficiency of single parents within an educational environment.



31. *Sky and Water I*, woodcut, 1938

From: The Magic Mirror of M.C. Escher. Bruno Ernst, New York: Ballantine Books, 1976.

"Turning Fins Into Feathers, or

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Decision Clarification for Non-Traditional Students

Change is like the Maurits Escher drawing that serves as the frontispiece to this article: the fish change into birds, but the steps are gradual, sometimes subtle, and each builds almost indecipherably on the one before. The fins change to wings, so that ultimately the fish is freed from its restrictive environment, and the bird can fly to heights previously beyond the limits of its transmogrified past. It's an evolutionary process, like a biological evolution; incipient limbs ultimately allow the single organism to crawl, to walk, to soar.

In her presentation yesterday,[2] Gina Bertolini made an

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[2]"Year Number Two of the Single-Parent Self-Sufficiency Program: Its Successes, Its Rewards and Its Challenges." Gina Bertolini and Sandra Krajewski, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, presented at the Second Annual National Conference on Education and Training: The Route to Seld-Sufficiency for Single

important point: many single parents returning to school do not lack self-esteem. And I think she's right. But I'd like to take a closer look at this idea, in the light of Escher's evolutionary imagery. We know that many non-traditional students returning to school do express doubts about their ability to do well, and Bruce Spector noted yesterday[3] that Barbara Davis Cheng's work suggests that while these students often have a high need for achievement, as conceptualized by David McClelland, they also often show a high fear of failure. And both of these observations seem to have been made with regard to a selected group of students who were highly motivated, rather than the range of individuals affected by mandatory educational initiatives involving the goal of self-sufficiency for those currently receiving some form of public assistance.

Sociologists, studying the intersection of the

Parents, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, June 12-14, 1990.

[3]"Breaking the Bonds of Poverty: A Motivational Profile of Selected Welfare Single Mothers Entering College." Barbara Davis Cheng and Bruce Spector, Trinity College of Vermont, presented at the Second Annual National Conference on Education anfd Training: The Route to Self-Sufficiency for Single Parents, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, June 12-14, 1990.

individual with society, define self-esteem in some fairly complex ways. One element of self-esteem has to do with IDENTITY, that is, what one thinks of oneself, regardless of context. This often has a lot to do with how one believes one is regarded by OTHERS, especially significant others, because we believe that these people relate to us as individuals, apart from what we do. Then there is SITUATIONAL self-esteem, a matter of how well one believes one is regarded in a particular CONTEXT, how well one thinks one can accomplish certain TASKS required in a given situation.

The first element we might call SELF-CONFIDENCE: it is about the self, and travels with the individual in any context. The second element is SELF-COMPETENCE: it has to do with one's ability to handle specific situations. Self-confidence is an IDENTITY component, while self-competence is a PERFORMANCE or TASK-ORIENTED compenent of self-esteem. These two separate elements are often designated INTRINSIC versus EXTRINSIC aspects of an individual's sense of self.

The two methods presented in this short paper are designed to tap into both aspects of self-esteem, and to

identify ways in which students can generalize the self-esteem they already have to new situations (here the Prior Jobs Inventory is most useful), and help surround themselves with others (using the Relationship Circle) who are helpful rather than toxic to their educational and personal goals.

SELF-ESTEEM

IDENTITY	SITUATIONAL
"Who Am I?"	"How well do I do?"
SELF-CONFIDENCE	SELF-COMPETENCE
INTRINSIC	EXTRINSIC
INTERPERSONAL	INSTRUMENTAL
SELF	PERFORMANCE/GOALS
INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
Relationship Circle	Prior Jobs Inventory

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* Figure 1 *
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Client Group

Many single parents involved in pursuing higher education are non-traditional women students returning to school after taking time off to bear their children, or women whose "singlehood" is related to a recent divorce, and who find that they must equip themselves to improve the economic status of both themselves and their children.

These women often have background skills and experiences which can be useful to them in their academic work. Frequently, however, they may not realize this, because they see themselves as people who have been out of the educational milieu for a few years, and they are often less than self-confident about their ability to handle academic work.

Goals of the Techniques

Part of the goal of any program working with such students would be to develop their self-esteem and self-confidence by helping them to identify the skills they

already possess which would be of use to them as they return to school. Additionally, these students may need special help in identifying careers which interest them.

It is also important that returning non-traditional students with other significant others in their lives be able to identify sources of practical and emotional support both for their decision to return to school, and the actual work of getting through a degree program. Because these students are often balancing class time, study time, child care or family demands, and sometimes a job to pay for it all, it is crucial that they be able to identify the people in their lives who can provide the most support, and, unfortunately, that they identify those people who may, deliberately or inadvertently, "sabotage" the returning student's educational goals.

Practitioners

While some institutions provide entire programs to help such students, many do not yet have full-fledged programs in place. In that case, the role of the individual faculty

member or advising center staff member becomes even more crucial.

Techniques

Two techniques based on Values Clarification and Values Realization research and materials may be especially useful.

"Prior Jobs Inventory"

A "Prior Jobs Inventory" can help students identify skills and experiences in their backgrounds which can strengthen their academic work, and which additionally may provide clues as to future careers that would be especially desirable and productive.[4] Provide each student[5] with an

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[4]The "Prior Jobs Inventory" is useful for identifying SKILLS. The PJI is therefore INSTRUMENTAL and EXTRINSIC.

[5]Each of these techniques may be done either individually or in groups. Therefore "each student" might refer to an individual student with whom one is doing advising work, or a member of a group of non-traditional students who are participating together in an exercise in which they both generate individual information/insights, and also in which they may share some of their findings with each other.

inventory sheet[6], and ask each student to list on the longer lines on the left-hand side of the paper all the jobs, paid or volunteer, which she has held in her life. Allow students 5 to 10 minutes for this acitivity. Then ask each student to draw a set of symbols in the small boxes set off by double lines across the top of the paper. A "$" stands for, "In this job I made enough money." A Heart stands for, "In this job I received love and respect from colleagues." A "!" stands for, "This job was exciting and challenging." A thumbprint stands for, "In this job I made an impression, I had an impact, I made a difference." An open eye stands for, "In this job I learned something about myself." In the sixth box, place a "+", which means, "This is a job I'd do again."

After each student has drawn in the symbols, ask her to consider all the jobs she has listed, in terms of what was true about each job: was it challenging? Did she make a difference? Did she learn something about herself? The student should place a check mark on the horizontal line on which she has listed each job, under the small box standing

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[6]See Appendix A.

for each symbolic category, if that category applied to that job. Allow 10 minutes or so for this part of the exercise.

When the student considers what she has identified about each job she has held, she may begin to see patterns, of what she has valued, where she found job satisfaction, and skills which have stood her in good stead. Additionally, she may begin to identify potential career goals, in terms of jobs like those she would do again.

"Relationship Circle"

A "Relationship Circle" can help identify other people in the student's life who may be sources of either emotional support or emotional stress, and whom it may therefore be desirable either to bring closer or to distance in order to help the student with her goals.[7] Provide each student with a Relationship Circle chart.[8] Tell the students that they are the "ME" at the center of the concentric circles. Ask

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[7]"Relationship Circles are useful for identifying ENEMIES and ALLIES. RCs are therefore INTERPERSONAL and INTRINSIC.

[8]See Appendix B.

them to place, at appropriate "social distances," all the persons in their lives: family members, work colleagues, friends. The "social distance" should be measured from the center, that is, the person or persons closest to the student socially and emotionally should be placed in the circle next to "ME." The person or persons next most close would be placed in the next circle out, and so forth. Students can identify others by name, initials, or whatever symbolic system is convenient. It also helps to encourage students to move beyond "conventional" assumptions, that is, many of us are <u>not</u> equally close to each parent, thought it is often expected that we place both parents in the same circle. Likewise with a student's children. Suggest to students that they do not have to follow convention here, but should identify real differences in actual emotional closeness with individuals in their lives. Allow about 10 minutes for this task.

Then ask each student to consider which of the people she has placed on the chart are particularly helpful and supportive of her life as she is living it, including her return to school and her educational goals. Ask her as well

to identify those individuals who seem to be less happy with her current decisions, who express doubts, or outright hostility, at her educational plans and goals. Ask that she draw arrows from where the supportive people are currently placed, moving them potentially closer to "ME," and that she draw arrows moving the unhelpful people further away from her. This part of the exercise may introduce some discomfort, particularly if the student begins to identify some immediate family members as "toxic" people that she would really like to distance. Suggest that this exercise may prove somewhat eye-opening, and be prepared to be supportive of discoveries on the part of the student that are not completely easy or convenient.[9]

In the last step of the exercise, ask each student to identify two of the individuals whom she would like to bring closer, and to derive one specific action step with regard to each of the two individuals that can be taken within the next week to help bring that individual closer. This can be

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[9]Max Weber once called sociology "the science of inconvenient facts," and this is a good example of a clinical sociology exercise which may present an individual with some "inconvenient facts" about the way in which her own life and set of acquaintances is presently structured.

something as simple as writing the person a letter, inviting the person to meet for lunch, or making a telephone call to set up some future plan. The objective is to gain support from an individual who will help the student by being supportive of her daily routine and her long-term goals. It is probably not necessary, and may not be helpful, to ask the student to design specific steps to distance individuals seen as toxic. The student will draw her own conclusions from that half of the exercise, and will usually take whatever action she deems appropriate on her own. The learning is the important part, and she will have done that as she recognized her need to draw arrows out and away from "ME."

A Gentle Caveat

While advising should not become unlicensed "therapy," values clarification techniques are easily and properly used by faculty and advisors who become trained in their

application.[10]

Theoretical Background

The purpose of this presentation is to show how the two techniques mentioned above may be effectively used by faculty advisors. Values clarification research, the work of Sidney Simon and Lee Silverstein, and some of the theoretical bases of Albert Ellis' Rational-Emotive Therapy, as well as anecdotal evidence from my own use of these techniques over several years, suggests that they are effective in helping single parents returning to school.

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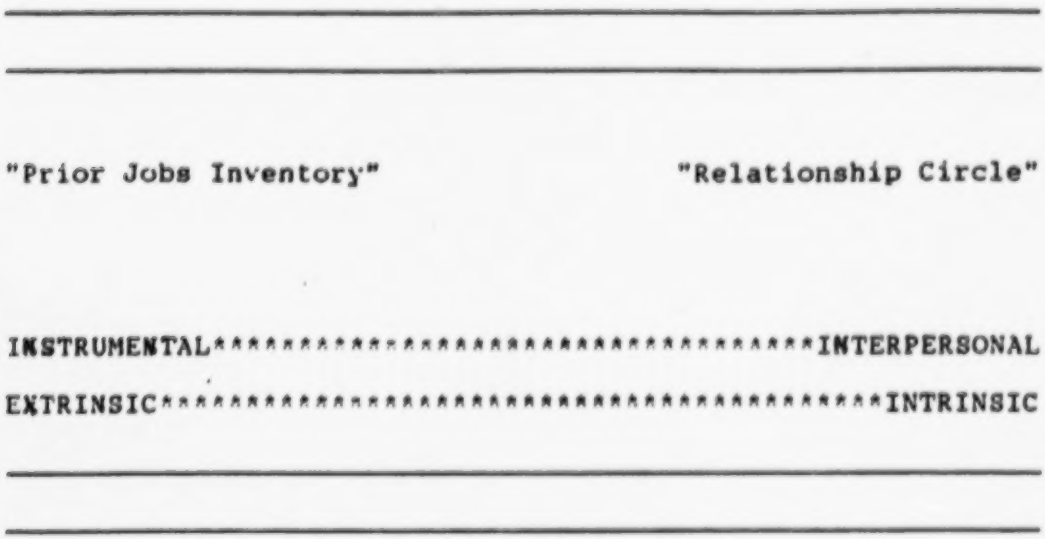
[10]I mention this only because, at a prior presentation I gave, involving similar materials, at the Eastern Regional Meetings of the National Academic Advising Association in March, 1989, in Springfield, Massachusetts, a clinical psychologist in the audience, who was also an academic advisor, decided that what I was suggesting amounted to doing therapy without a license. The work on Values Clarification and Values Realization has been so widely disseminated, and used in so many school systems by teachers who are neither clinical psychologists nor clinical sociologists, that I believe his concern to be misplaced.

Application

In using these two techniques, we are able to help students identify both SKILLS and "ENEMIES and ALLIES." The Prior Jobs Inventory involves elements which might be described as INSTRUMENTAL or EXTRINSIC aspects of a student's life, while the Relationship Circle involves aspects which are essentially INTERPERSONAL or INTRINSIC. There is therefore a continuum from INSTRUMENTALITY to INTIMACY involved between the two. The PJI is goal-oriented, while the RC is identity-oriented.



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* Figure 2 *
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Thus we are looking at two types of advising functions. Using the "Prior Jobs Inventory" places the faculty member or advisor closer to the traditional function of the academic counselor, while using the "Relationship Circle" may produce information and discussion which would bring the faculty member's role closer to that of a clinical sociologist/psychotherapist. Some faculty and advisors may

be familiar only with the traditional academic counselor model, and thus more comfortable limiting their work with students to that role. I would also suggest that faculty with some clinical experience or insight will both enjoy and do better using the "Relationship Circle" than will those who feel either uncomfortable or unskilled in talking about personal life issues with students.

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Jean H. Thoresen
Associate Professor
Sociology & Applied Social Relations
Eastern Connecticut State University

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APPENDIX A

INVENTORY SHEET

TOPIC: PRIOR JOBS

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APPENDIX B.

RELATIONAL ASSESSMENT CHART